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ABSTRACT

The Professional Development in Education Program at the University of Charleston (South Carolina) was developed to make meaningful connections between K-12 and higher education faculty. The program began in 1985 when school districts in the coastal region of South Carolina agreed to collaborate and cooperate to improve, increase, and enhance professional development opportunities for educators. It has evolved into a system that is flexible enough to meet the needs of a wide variety of educators in many settings yet structured enough to meet the academic regulations of an institution of higher education. A central feature of the program allows districts, schools, or individuals to request specialized courses that carry graduate credit. These are developed according to the requester's needs while the university's requirements are met through an approval and review process. Instructors must meet university employment criteria; when they do not, a college faculty member may serve as a mentor or co-teacher. Program strengths include quick response to educators' needs, teachers-teaching-teachers, possibility for in-depth study and review of an area, strong application and evaluation possibilities for new approaches, and active involvement of university faculty in school restructuring. Since 1989 over 650 sections of courses have been offered with over 13,500 educators enrolled. (JB)

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Partnering with Schools, Districts and Educators for Effective and Continuing Professional Development

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The availability of professional development opportunities for educators is a critical factor in the on-going restructuring of public education (Early, 1994; Schlechty, 1993; Tafel & Bertani, 1992). To accomplish successful restructuring, educators at all levels, preschool through graduate school, must have the opportunity to acquire new skills and knowledge and to implement and evaluate their effectiveness in schools and classrooms. The general acknowledgment of the importance of professional development for educators is reflected in recent federal legislation (Goals 2000: Educate America Act, 1993; Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1994; Dwight D. Eisenhower Professional Development Act, 1994) and state-adopted programs (South Carolina's Early Childhood and Academic Assistance Act 135, 1993; South Carolina's School to Work Act, 1994). The importance of skills, knowledge and experience cannot be underestimated as educators work cooperatively to improve education for all students.

One consistent challenge to the restructuring movement and its correlated professional development activities is the difficulty inherent in making meaningful connections between K-12 and higher education faculty. Clearly, the greatest benefit for the most people comes from both groups working together. The Professional Development in Education Program at the University of Charleston, South Carolina, was created to help meet this challenge. It is the purpose of this paper to briefly describe the program, its procedural guidelines, examples of professional development courses that have been offered, program strengths, results of evaluations of the program, and issues that have been raised.

The Program

The University of Charleston's Professional Development in Education Program began in 1985 when school districts in the coastal region of South Carolina agreed to collaborate and

cooperate to improve, increase and enhance professional development opportunities for educators. The program began simply as a contract course program; a school or school district would contract with the University to offer a course for graduate credit that would be taught at a local school. Each course had its own budget, and each had to be self-supporting. The program was jointly administered by the Office of Continuing Education and the School of Education.

As the University of Charleston grew in the late 1980's, administrative responsibility for the program was transferred completely to the School of Education. During these years, the professional development program expanded to the point that it became a permanent line item in the School of Education's budget. It was still expected to be self-supporting, but was given full status as a viable on-going activity of the University. The administration of the program became the responsibility of the Assistant Dean for Professional Development in Education in the School of Education, with an administrative assistant and clerical support supplied by the School.

The program has evolved into a system that is flexible enough to meet the needs of a wide variety of educators in a myriad of settings, yet structured enough to meet the academic regulations of an institution of higher education. Through the Professional Development in Education Program, school districts, individual schools, special projects or individual educators can request specialized courses that carry graduate credit for certified educators. Once the request is received by the Assistant Dean, she works with the initiator or proposed instructor of the course to develop a syllabus. The syllabus must meet the guidelines used in the School of Education, which include components such as course goals, objectives, description of activities, grading system, and methods of assessment. The Assistant Dean works with the instructor to assure that the course also meets University guidelines related to the number of hours of instructional time, and whether the course is offered as pass/fail or for a grade. A course location is determined, and the dates and times of the course are determined. Only in rare cases do courses follow the traditional university calendar. The syllabus and details about the course are then circulated to the School of Education's department chairs and dean for approval as proposed. Modifications are made as requested prior to the beginning of the course.

Course instructors must meet the same School of Education and University employment criteria used for all adjunct faculty. The proposed instructor's resume, credentials and recommendations are reviewed by the School of Education's department chairs and dean. A college faculty member may be asked to serve as a mentor or co-teacher if there is any discrepancy between University requirements and the instructor's credentials.

While the course is being developed, the Assistant Dean for Professional Development in

Education works with the course initiator to determine the fees associated with the course. The course can be offered as a full tuition course or as a contract course. In either case, fees can be the responsibility of the contracting agency or project, or the participants. For courses contracted for a specified number of participants that are offered off-campus, the fees are reduced significantly.

The Courses

A wide variety of courses have been developed and offered through the Professional Development in Education Program. Since its beginnings in 1982, over five hundred different topics have been covered. Content for courses have included areas such as interdisciplinary teaching across the curriculum, authentic assessment, inclusion, tropical and marine biology, effective use of technology, the whole language approach to teaching reading, cooperative learning, and using a literature base to teach mathematics. Titles of some courses that have been offered in the past few years are: Expanding the Curriculum with International Studies; Strategies for Teaching Critical Thinking; Tech Prep: Communications; Workplace Literacy; Bridging Education and Industry; Bioethics in the High School Biology Classroom; Teaching Reading and Writing to English as a Second Language Learners; Integrating the Fine Arts, K-12; Teaching Secondary Mathematics with Manipulatives; Integrating Multimedia into Middle School Math and Science; and Marine Ecology for Elementary Teachers. Interestingly, the titles of the courses offered over the last 10 years accurately reflect the trends in education during these two decades.

Program Strengths

The greatest strength of the program is its ability to respond quickly to the requests received for professional development courses. Luckily, the program at the University of Charleston evolved slowly, and the School of Education was able to protect the program from the inflexible constraints found at many universities. It is certain that if the program were to be developed today, university administrators would impose more restrictions thereby diminishing its flexibility and effectiveness. As currently operating, a new course can be developed and reviewed by the School of Education for approval in less than a month.

Using the teachers-teaching-teachers model is another strength of the program. No matter how professionally current college faculty remain, and no matter how many hours they

spend in K-12 schools in various roles, they can be seen as outsiders by public school personnel. Program participants most often see the instructors in this program as colleagues, thereby increasing their credibility and effectiveness as teachers. Also, the course instructors become on-site experts who can serve as resources who can continue to support the restructuring effort encouraged in their courses.

This model also allows for in-depth study and review of an area or an issue unique to a group of educators since the courses can be individualized for the requesting group. The participants also often have their instructor in their own or a nearby school and thus have easier access to them. Often many participants come from the same school, and consequently have colleagues to work with on projects and course activities.

Many of the courses require that new skills and knowledge be applied in the participants' classrooms, and that the participants evaluate the effectiveness of the changes. Including this very strong application component in the courses increases the chances that generalization takes place and that positive change is lasting.

Another strength is that the program encourages college faculty both in and outside of the School of Education to get actively involved in the restructuring of public education. Many faculty in the humanities and sciences have enthusiastically served as instructors in the program, to their benefit as well as to the benefit of the participants.

The University also benefits from the increased incentive that educators have to enroll in traditional graduate programs offered at the University. Up to 12 hours of coursework taken through the Professional Development Program can be applied to a graduate degree. Many educators find that professional development activities are extremely beneficial and that the pursuit of an advanced degree is professionally and personally rewarding.

Evaluation of the Program

One way to evaluate the success of the Professional Development in Education program is to report the number of courses that have been offered and number of participants who have taken them. In the past five years, over 650 sections of courses have been offered, with over 13,500 educators enrolled. It could be concluded from these numbers that the courses have had a significant and direct impact on education in South Carolina. However, other procedures have been used to evaluate the program, its courses, and the instructors.

Since its inception, the program has been assessed on an on-going basis through the use of the University's standardized faculty evaluation procedure. All faculty teaching courses in

the program are evaluated by enrolled participants using the University of Charleston's standardized faculty evaluation forms. Summaries of responses are circulated by the Assistant Dean for Professional Development in Education to the department chairs and dean in the School of Education for review at the end of each semester. The individual faculty's evaluations are compared to the overall University means and the overall School of Education means. Significant discrepancies or issues are discussed by the assistant dean, the chairs and dean. The faculty evaluation summaries are also again reviewed by the assistant dean each time an instructor is considered for additional teaching responsibilities in the program.

In addition, questionnaires about the Professional Development in Education program were mailed to participants on two separate occasions and to instructors on one occasion. In the fall of 1992, questionnaires were mailed to a random sample of 100 participants enrolled in the Professional Development courses during the 1991-92 school year. The five page questionnaire had 17 statements that the participants ranked on a five point scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Opportunities for written comments were given for each of the 17 statements. Thirty-five completed questionnaires were returned.

Eleven of the 17 questions related to course policies, procedures and instructor competencies and addressed the assignments, in-class activities, teaching methods, the syllabus, and assessment. For these eleven questions the number of participants who responded to the questions with the positive "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" ranged from 26 to 34.

Three of the 17 questions related to administrative components of the courses such as registration and transcripts. For these three questions the number of participants who responded with the positive "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" ranged from 27 to 33.

Two of the 17 questions related to the applicability of what was learned in the courses to the participants own classrooms. For these two questions the number of participants who responded with the positive "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" was 31 and 32.

One question asked if the participant would recommend the courses to colleagues. The number of participants who responded with the positive "Strongly Agree" or "Agree" was 31.

After review of the completed questionnaires it was concluded by the School of Education administrators that the courses offered were being positively received and that the courses were making a positive impact on the participants.

During Fall Semester, 1994, another questionnaire was mailed to a random sample of 162 participants who had completed Professional Development courses during Spring Semester, 1994. There were eight questions to which the respondent answered "Yes" or "No." Respondents were also asked to give written comments about their responses. This

questionnaire was returned by 34 participants.

One of the eight questions asked whether the participants knew or worked with the instructor prior to the course, and whether that had any adverse impact on the course or the final grade assigned. Half of the participants responded that they knew or worked with the instructor prior to the course, and of the 23 written responses, 18 indicated that knowing the instructor had a positive impact, and five indicated that it had no impact.

Four of the eight questions related to the content of the course. One question asked if the course objectives were appropriate for graduate credit. All 34 respondents answered "Yes." The 11 written responses were all positive about the graduate level objectives and activities. Another question asked if the skills learned were applicable in the participants' classrooms. Thirty-three responded "Yes" and one responded "No." The eleven written responses specified how the skills had been applied. A third question asked if the assignments were meaningful. Twenty-nine responded "Yes," and one responded "No." The five written responses described assignments considered meaningful. A fourth question asked the participants to compare the Professional Development course with traditional graduate courses. Twenty-seven participants had taken a traditional graduate course in the last 10 years. When comparing the two, the six of the seven written responses indicated preference for the Professional Development course because of the applicability of the information.

One of the eight question dealt with the University's monitoring of the courses and the instructors. When asked if the course could be improved with more direct monitoring by the University, all 34 participants responded "No."

One question asked if the University should continue to offer Professional Development courses. Thirty-three responded "Yes," and one responded "No."

The last question asked for suggestions about future courses. Topic suggestions included creative arts, advanced computer, grant writing, and extensions of courses already taken.

A parallel questionnaire was mailed to 46 instructors of Professional Development courses who had taught during Spring Semester, 1994. It included seven questions to which respondents answered "Yes" or "No." Respondents were also asked to give comments about their responses. Ten instructors returned a completed questionnaire.

Of this group, five knew the participants before the course started, and five did not. Three written responses indicated that knowing the participants was beneficial and three indicated that it did not have an impact on grading.

All instructors thought their course objectives were appropriate for graduate credit, that they provided skills applicable to the participants classrooms, and that the assignments

were meaningful. When asked if the courses could be improved with more direct monitoring by the University, all instructors said "No." All also responded that the University should continue offering Professional Development courses.

The last question asked for suggestions about future courses. Topic suggestions included adult education, whole language, and math.

The 1994 questionnaire supported the conclusion reached after review of the 1992 questionnaire. Participants and instructors were again consistently positive about the courses.

Program Issues

In spite of consistently positive feedback about the program, certain issues must be addressed in order to continue to strengthen the program. Among those issues are:

- *How to maintain the quality of instruction and ensure that research and application are included in each course.
- *How to incorporate new strategies and techniques into the professional development program.
- *How to link the University's preservice and graduate programs with the professional development program.
- *How to deal with the grading issue when colleagues are working with each other in a student/teacher situation.
- *How to assess a fair cost to the participants while maintaining the program as self-supporting at the University.
- *How to ensure the professional development courses do not decrease enrollments in traditional graduate courses.
- *How to network with school districts and other institutions of higher education in South Carolina.

Clearly, the program must continue to evolve in order to address these issues and restructure itself as time goes by.

Conclusions

It is hoped that the momentum built over the last decade will continue to carry the Professional Development in Education Program well into the next century. However, the current climate in federal funding of education programs does not auger well for the continuation of federally funded programs that link with this one. If federal funding is cut

significantly, states will need to put greater emphasis on professional development for educators while maintaining their commitment to financing that development. Hopefully, we as educators have learned the lesson that change in education is not something that happens spontaneously; it must be encouraged and nurtured by whatever means available.

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